

# Ancient prayers for modern times: A symphony of praise to God

Message for November 23, 2014 – by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Psalm 150

## Children's Message:

I'd like to do some arithmetic this morning. You remember the song we sang a few minutes ago – "Allelu, Alleluia"? I'd like to count how many times in that song we praise God.

### Allelu, Alleluia

Allelu! Allelu! Allelu! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord!  
Allelu! Allelu! Allelu! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord!  
Praise ye the Lord! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord!

How many times does the song say "Allelu"? 6  
- Alleluia? 5  
- Praise ye the Lord? 6

Now here's something important: the word "Alleluia" means "Praise the Lord." And "Allelu" is just a short version of the same word.

So add all those up, and what do we get? 17

Seventeen! Seventeen times in that song we say, "Praise the Lord." In fact, that's *all* we do in that entire song!

We do it because God is great – *brainstorm with kids for words that describe God.*

**Message:** "Ancient prayers for modern times: A symphony of praise to God"

Philip Yancey in one of his books tells about a woman who was devastated when her husband left her, shortly after their only son had died. She wasn't ready to talk with friends about it, but she didn't want to stay alone in their house. So she got in her car and drove. Drove for hours until nightfall, when she pulled into a motel. She checked into a room, and sat down on the side of the bed. "What now?" she wondered aloud.

Looking for a phone book to order in some food, she opened the drawer in the bedside table, only to find a Bible placed there by the Gideons. She wanted to pray, but didn't know how. She knew enough about the Bible to know that the book of Psalms was mostly prayers, so she turned there.

She read the first Psalm, which was about obeying God. It didn't do anything for her, so she went on to the next one. She kept on reading these prayers, one after the other. Some were so full of joy that she wanted to puke. But she found others in which the person praying shook the fist at God, demanding God come down and answer for all the injustice and wrong in life. She could relate to that. She kept on reading, hour after hour, until she finally came to the end of the Psalms.

She hadn't found any answers to her own questions, but she had found peace. She had encountered God that night, and knew that God cared. She didn't know how she was going to cope, but she knew that she would, with God's help.

That is where we find ourselves this morning. Over the past two months, we have read many of the Psalms. These prayers and songs were written with passion, sometimes in moments of ecstasy, and sometimes in dark depression. At times they ring with joy and love and hope, and at times they openly ask whether God cares at all.

Today we look at Psalm 150 which concludes the book of Psalms.

## 1) Why do we praise God?

Psalm 150:1-2, New Living Translation:  
Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his heavenly dwelling; praise him in his mighty heaven! Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness!

The first half of the Psalm can be taken as an answer to the question, "Why do we praise God?" Answer: look around you! Look at the heavens – the universe and galaxies and stars. Look at all the wonderful things God has done.

The Bible often speaks of God with words that overwhelm us with God's bigness: God is almighty; around the throne of God are ten thousand times ten thousand worshippers; mountains bow down and

worship God. At the same time, consider how often Jesus makes us think of God with small ideas: clothing the flowers of the field, caring for the sparrow, rejoicing in heaven over just one sinner who repents. Both are descriptions of the same God: who is greater than the universe, and who cares about the person whom the world considers the least important.

The good news of the Gospel is that God loves us, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that the awesome Creator laid down his life for mere humans.

All this and more is why we praise God.

## 2) How do we praise God?

**Psalm 150:3-6, New Living Translation:**

Praise him with a blast of the trumpet;  
praise him with the lyre and harp!  
Praise him with the tambourine and dancing;  
praise him with stringed instruments and flutes!  
Praise him with a clash of cymbals;  
praise him with loud clanging cymbals.  
Let everything that lives sing praises to the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!

The second half of the Psalm can be taken as an answer to the question, “How do we praise God?” Answer: all kinds of ways! It lists a wide variety of musical instruments: brass, strings, percussion – even dancing.

What are some ways in which we can praise God in our lives? All kinds of ways!

- singing
- prayer
- obeying God’s commands
- helping people in need

This verse from Paul’s letter to the Colossians sums it up:

**Colossians 3:17, New Living Translation:**

Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father.

## 3) When it’s all said and done: Praise the Lord!

Here is the final verse of the final Psalm:

**Psalm 150:6**

Let everything that lives sing praises to the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Who does this? It is not just the paid professionals, the priests and pastors, although it certainly includes them. It is not just those with the gift of music who have practised it singing in the choir or playing in a band, although it certainly includes them. It is not just those whose lives have been full of health and happiness, of family and fulfillment, although it certainly includes them. It is everyone.

Question: Some of you here today may be asking, “How can I praise the Lord when it seems as though everything in my life is going wrong?”

Answer: Let me tell a story, taken from Philip Yancey’s book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* Rebecca was part of the Bible study group at the church he attends.

Rebecca is a quiet woman, and in weeks of meeting together she had rarely opened her mouth. When someone mentioned divorce, however, she proceeded to tell her own story. She had married a pastor who had some renown as a retreat leader. It became apparent, however, that her husband had a dark side. He dabbled in pornography, and on his trips to other cities he solicited prostitutes. Sometime he asked Rebecca for forgiveness, sometimes he did not. In time, he left her for another woman, Julianne.

Rebecca told us how painful it was for her, a pastor’s wife, to suffer this humiliation. Some church members who had respected her husband treated her as if his sexual straying had been her fault. Devastated, she found herself pulling away from human contact, unable to trust another person. She could never put her husband out of mind because they had children and she had to make regular contact with him in order to arrange his visitation privileges.

Rebecca had the increasing sense that unless she forgave her former husband, a hard lump of revenge would be passed on to their children. For months she prayed. At first her prayers seemed as vengeful as some of the Psalms: she asked God to give her ex-husband “what he deserved.”

Finally she came to the place of letting God, not herself, determine “what he deserved.”

One night Rebecca called her ex-husband and said, in a shaky, strained voice, “I want you to know that I forgive you for what you’ve done to me. And I forgive Julianne too.” He laughed off her apology, unwilling to admit he had done anything wrong. Despite his rebuff, that conversation helped Rebecca get past her bitter feelings.

A few years later Rebecca got a hysterical phone call from Julianne, the woman who had “stolen” her husband. She had been attending a ministerial conference with him in Minneapolis, and he had left the hotel room to go for a walk. A few hours passed, then Julianne heard from the police: her husband had been picked up for soliciting a prostitute.

On the phone with Rebecca, Julianne was sobbing, “I never believed you,” she said. “I kept telling myself that even if what you said was true, he had changed. And now this. I feel so ashamed, and hurt, and guilty. I have no one on earth who can understand. Then I remembered the night when you said you forgave us. I thought maybe you could understand what I’m going through. It’s a terrible thing to ask, I know, but could I come talk to you?”

Somehow Rebecca found the courage to invite Julianne over that same evening. They sat in her living room, cried together, shared stories of betrayal, and in the end prayed together. Julianne now points to that evening as the time when she became a Christian.

“For a long time, I had felt foolish about forgiving my husband,” Rebecca told us. “But that night I realized the fruit of forgiveness. Julianne was right. I could understand what she was going through. And because I had been there too, I could be on her side, instead of her enemy. We both had been betrayed by the same man. Now it was up to me to teach her how to overcome the hatred and revenge and guilt she was feeling.”

### Next step:

- *Decide* to praise God. You may not feel like it right now. But if our faith is based on feelings, it will look like ocean waves. No, our faith is based on what we choose.
- The song we’re going to sing as we close is about praising God. Again, you may not feel like it. But I’m asking you to decide to praise. When you come to a line that is hard for you, sing it anyway. And don’t just mumble; sing it out loud with all your heart.

So, yes, when the Bible says “Praise God,” it means “Yes, even you.” Amen.